Indian classical music vs. film and pop music

Kishori Amonkar's viewpoint

Snippets from the speech made by Amonkar at a recent gathering in Kolhapur...

REPUTED classical singer Kishori Amonkar is well-known for her playback in *Geet Gaya Pattharon Ne*, besides for her mastery over singing *raagas*. After her first song in films, she received a number of offers for playback singing in films, but she declined because, according to her "film music is not as ecstatic as the classical," and hence she keeps herself away from the film world. While speaking on behalf of her institution 'Rasmanch' recently at Kolhapur, Amonkar reiterated her stand on Indian classical versus film and pop music. Said she, "The Indian classical has high tradition and various *raagas* represent various moods and human feelings. Notes in *raagas* present feelings peculiar to *raagas*, which create an atmosphere when both a singer and audience become one with the mood and the *raag*."

While talking about this vital significance of the classical music, Amonkar pointed out the eternal strength and quality which is not realised in the film and pop music. The reason, she pointed out, is that for mastery in the classical music, one has to dedicate whole life, to the *Swar Sadhana*, so as to achieve proficiency and near perfection, leading to ultimate ecstasy and *Atmanand*. This music is synchronising with nature and *Raag Sangeet* is real *Bhav Sangeet*.

At the same time the singer mentioned that brushing aside all film songs as non-classical, light and insignificant is doing injustice to musicians like Naushad, who has not only based most of his songs on *raagas*, but has been equally vehement about advocating that Indian classical music, which should be preserved and saved from influence of the pop and Western music. Amonkar said there are many Hindi films, like *Baiju Bawara, Ganga Jamuna*, wherein songs are based on *raagas* befitting the specific moods of characters.

Amonkar wants classical music to be popular and spread widely to the masses, instead of film songs. But agreed that it is difficult. As one member of the audience in Kolhapur pointed out that classical singers have limited audience. Also the concerts by classical musicians, including her concerts are not frequent and widespread for the masses to understand the ecstatic mood of *raagas*. Not to mention the hefty fees that classical musicians demand. (In the course of the discussion she said that charges for her *maifil* are rupees three lakhs).

If a classical singer has a right to decide his or her remuneration, however costly, which may be beyond the reach of common people, how can the classical music be as popular as Kishori expects? Some special effort have to be made, Amonkar said, sidelining the fee issue altogether. She said one could follow in the footsteps of Naushad, and classical singers should respond to the demand for playback singing in films, if the musicians are composing notes with relevance to classical *raagas*. "Films are accessible to common people than a *maifil*, which is specially meant for the affordable elite class in society," she said. The public opinion would be that classical singers sacrifice the monetary aspect.

To talk about the significance of classical music, and at the same time to restrict the audience by prohibitive cost of live concerts is obviously a contradictory formula, we felt. Naushad as a film composer is as much particular and sincere about classical music as Amonkar is.

Their crusade against pop is similar. If both come together for a common cause and enrich the film music with classical-based tunes, the masses might, after all, realise the significance of the Indian classical music.

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